

March 25, 2019

Judiciary Committee

Testimony in favor of HB 7389 An Act Concerning Confidentiality in the Case of Discretionary Transfer of a Juvenile Case to the Regular Criminal Docket and Implementing the Recommendations of the Juvenile Justice Policy and Oversight Committee

Hello, my name is Romelo Goss. I am from Bridgeport, CT. Thank you Senator Winfield and Representative Stafstrom for the opportunity to testify today.

I am in favor of HB 7389 because I feel we need to remove youth from adult prison and jail. I feel we are hurting them more than helping them. Sitting at the police station till the next morning to get my bond sent was already traumatizing. Being in Manson, I felt like I was fighting for simple rights as a human being. The right to eat, sleep, and have recreation peacefully. I was incarcerated at Manson at the age of 17. My first week there I was in segregation while being investigated for potentially being a gang member. Being locked in the cell not much bigger than the size of the desk I'm sitting at now with one window that's about 5 inches wide and 9 inches long and the window in the back of the cell that's blocked off so I can't see outside. Without a fully developed brain, within an hour the only thing on my mind was suicide. I thought it was the only way out of the nightmare I was now living.

When I was finally let into general population, entering into my cottage, I felt like I was walking into a dog pound, all of the youth banging on the doors to get my attention to send threats. While I was passing every door I would look at the kid behind it. All I could see were kids, black like me, that had been turned out due to the system.

At the time, my family was struggling, so I couldn't make many phone calls home. I didn't have money for commissary or envelopes to write anybody. Even if I did have envelopes I didn't have anyone to write since I was living on the streets. So there was no one there to support me mentally. I couldn't talk to the mental health people. I was young and dumb, but not completely stupid. I could tell when somebody actually cares what I'm telling them and they didn't care.

The environment was like a war zone. I remember being locked in the gang block, security risk group it was called. I was in the first of the five phases where I had to go to the rec yard while being cuffed in handcuffs from behind. One day a CO had left one of my handcuffs loose. With it being loose I knew I could slip my hand out and easily attack another inmate. Before he let me out, the CO told me to "go out there and make me proud." This meant he wanted me to go out to the yard and fight someone. The very people hired to protect and prevent these situations from happening sent me out to go do it. Would you honestly say this is an environment for a child at the age of 17. In all honesty, do you think I would be re-entering the streets, leaving an environment like that changed in a positive way.

Thank you for the chance to testify.